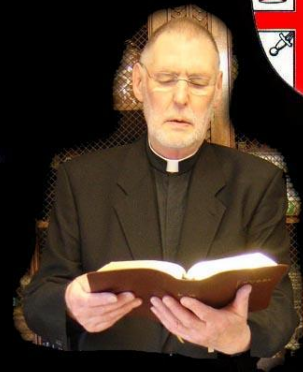


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches

Between Death and Resurrection

by Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

The Biblical teaching on the three resurrections provides hope, destiny and justice for all. There will be three resurrections for three distinct groups of people -- each in their own order, each in their own time through the power of a perfectly merciful and perfectly just God not willing that any should perish forever.

Throughout history, man has had a fascination with death and the afterlife. Will you and your loved ones live again? Do you have an immortal soul, as so many professing “Christians” believe? The biblical teachings on life and death have been primary targets of Satan the devil from the beginning. The first recorded lie was that man would not die (Genesis 3:4), and man has believed the “immortal soul” lie ever since.

Obviously, not everyone believes in life after death. A prominent British humanist said, “On humanist ideals life leads to nothing and every pretence that it does not is a deceit.” There are, however, plenty of good reasons for believing in life after death for those who have an open mind on the subject. These are not in themselves *proof*, but if the weight of evidence counts for anything, I would suggest that the balance is very strongly in favour of its truth. Consider the following lines of evidence.

It seems that the human race has a built-in instinct for expectation of life beyond the grave. The well-known evangelist Billy Graham, who majored in

anthropology, says he did not find a race anywhere in the world that did not believe in life after death. Sir James Frazer, one of the greatest of authorities on the uncivilised races, remarks in his book *Belief in Immortality*:

“Among the savage races a life after death is not a matter of speculation and conjecture of hope and fear, it is a practical certainty, which the individual as little dreams of doubting as he doubts the reality of his conscious existence.”

Peter Kreeft¹ has written about what he calls the deepest hope of the human heart—the hope of heaven. In *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*, he says:

“From earliest times humanity has hoped for heaven. The earliest artifacts are burial mounds. The dead were always prepared for the great journey.”

C. S. Lewis² expressed a similar thought in *The Problem of Pain*:

“There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else.”

Selwyn Hughes³ adds a useful analogy from nature:

Birds, beasts and fish have what students of natural history call 'the homing instinct'. Cats and dogs find their way back across vast stretches of unknown country. Salmon return unerringly to spawn in the rivers of their birth. Nothing in all nature is more wonderful than this amazing

¹ Peter Kreeft, Ph.D., is a professor of philosophy at Boston College. He loves his five grandchildren, four children, one wife, one cat, and one God.

² C.S. Lewis was born in 1898 and brought up in a very strict, religious household. While he was quite young, his mother died of cancer but the "stiff upper lip" in favour at the time meant he wasn't allowed to grieve. He became an Oxford don and led a sheltered life. He seriously questioned his religious beliefs and finally left the church.

³ Selwyn Hughes (1928 - 2006) was, of course, the Welsh Christian minister best known for writing the daily devotional *Every Day with Jesus* series. He founded the UK-based Christian ministry CWR (Crusade for World Revival), and also wrote around fifty Christian books. Former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey has described Hughes as a "giant in the faith." There are various daily devotional Bible booklets around, and, in the past, I have checked out several of these and was not always impressed, but I always thought that *Every Day with Jesus* was the best of those which are generally available here in the UK. Of course, in time, *Every Day with Jesus* went around the world, and I think that it thoroughly deserved to. It has been claimed that - at it's peak - this valuable publication was read daily by almost a million people in 130 countries around the world.

‘homing instinct’ in some of the lower species. I want to suggest that deep in the heart of every human being is a homing instinct—a yearning for heaven. It can be ignored, overlaid, denied, but it is there nevertheless—persistent and ineradicable.

Even in our modern, secular society, every poll that is taken on the subject indicates that a substantial majority believe in some form of life after death. Is this belief merely wishful thinking arising from some evolutionary process that has produced a growing self-consciousness and a belief in our importance as beings at the top of the evolutionary scale? Or could it be that an eternal and loving God has given us this awareness because he longs to enjoy a relationship with us that will last forever? As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it, “**He has...set eternity in the human heart.**” (3:11).

On biblical grounds we believe that people are separated from God because of their sins but that mankind can be reconciled to him by becoming disciples in accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour. This is by belief in the Gospel, through repentance, and through baptism by total immersion in water. We do not believe we can be sure of being saved, believing instead that salvation comes as a result of a life of obedience to the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But, what does really happens to us between the death of our present bodies and the resurrection of the new? There are those who have taken the word “**sleep**”, used fourteen times for the death of believers in the New Testament, to imply that we have no conscious existence during this period.

However, whatever claimed about the reality of life immediately after death, believers are in a state of non-existence, knowing nothing until the Resurrection at the return of Christ. Following the judgement at that time, the accepted receive the gift of immortality, and live with Christ on a restored Earth, assisting him to establish the Kingdom of God and to rule over the mortal population for a thousand years (the Millennium). We believe that the Kingdom will be centred upon Israel, but Jesus Christ will also reign over all the other nations on the earth.

Sleep between death and resurrection

Jesus confirmed this truth after his friend Lazarus died. Jesus likened death to sleep. If Lazarus had gone to heaven to be with Almighty God, Jesus’ bringing him back to earth eventually to die again would have been no kindness.

The inspired account states that at the burial place, Jesus said in a loud voice: “Lazarus, come on out!” The Bible continues: “The man that had been dead

came out.” Lazarus began life anew. Jesus knew that Lazarus had never left the earth. He had been lying lifeless in a tomb.

The first-century Christians did not view the soul as the Greeks did. If Lazarus had had an immortal soul that flitted off, free and happy, at the time of death, would not the account in John chapter 11 read very differently?

Surely Jesus would have told his followers if Lazarus was alive and well and conscious in heaven; on the contrary, he echoed the Hebrew Scriptures and told them that Lazarus was asleep, unconscious. (Verse 11) Surely Jesus would have rejoiced if his friend was enjoying a wonderful new existence; instead, we find him weeping publicly over this death.

Surely, if Lazarus’ soul had been in heaven, reveling in blissful immortality, Jesus would never have been so cruel as to summon him back to live a few more years in the “prison” of an imperfect physical body amid sick and dying mankind.

Did Lazarus return from death with glowing tales of his marvelous four days as a liberated, disembodied spirit being? No, he did not.

Believers in the immortal soul will respond that this was because the man’s experience was too awesome for words. But that argument fails to convince; after all, could not Lazarus still have told his loved ones at least that much that he had had an experience too marvelous to describe?

Instead, Lazarus said nothing about any experiences he had had while dead. Think of it silent on the one subject that is the focus of more human curiosity than any other: what death is like! That silence can be explained in only one way. There was nothing to tell. The dead are asleep, unconscious.

Resurrection from the dead

Does the resurrection from the dead seem like a mystery to you? The apostle Paul brings clarity to this often-overlooked Biblical truth while acknowledging human mortality: For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. (I Corinthians 15:22-23 KJV 1611).

Paul here describes an order of resurrections commencing with "those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming," which Revelation 20:5 refers to as "the first resurrection." An order of resurrections commencing with one called "the first" means that there are subsequent and sequential resurrections -- and indeed these are described more fully elsewhere in the Bible.

A First Resurrection for Those Who Are the saved one's by grace.

Paul describes the first resurrection, of those who have been the Messiah's faithful servants at his coming, this way: Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (I Corinthians 15:51-53, *ibid.*).

Have you ever thought that one resurrection might be better than another? The first resurrection is to immortality and RULERSHIP in the Kingdom of God. God has not required more of some and less of others to gain immortality -- but He *has* called some to HIGHER OFFICES in a *better* resurrection.

Read Hebrews 12, noticing in particular verse 23. Here we find mentioned the "Church of the firstborn." In ancient times it was the custom for the FIRSTBORN to receive the GREATER SHARE of the father's estate. God is to make us heir of all things; and yet WHO will receive the greater share? The FIRSTBORN! They will have greater opportunity for service. They will be in higher positions of authority in God's (Yehovah) Kingdom. The one who has the highest office *can more effectively help more people*.

In verse 23 of Hebrews 12 the word "firstborn" is somewhat misleading. The word in the Greek is PLURAL -- in other words if we were to translate it correctly in English, we would say the "firstborn ones." They will have an *earlier* opportunity for service in the Kingdom of God our Heavenly Father, and will have a *greater* opportunity of serving than those who come afterwards in the second resurrection.

In ancient times God (Yehovah) called the firstborn of each family to serve Him. If the firstborn failed then God had to call others to do this service. In the Millennium Yehovah God will again use this same principle of using the firstborn for His special service in governing the world.

The duties and benefits of the firstborn rely on OBEDIENCE rather than natural inheritance. The Bible shows that a younger brother could replace the natural firstborn in a family if the elder was disobedient or could not perform the necessary duties.

This brings us to the Messiah (Jesus Christ) as the firstborn. We read in Psalm 89:27 that God would make him (the Messiah) His firstborn. The KEY word in this reference is the use of the word "make" -- that God would "make" him His firstborn. By his natural, human birth the Messiah was *not* automatically the

"firstborn" of all human beings. It was the Messiah's PERFECT OBEDIENCE to the Lord God, Yehovah's will that made him worthy of the position of the firstborn.

In I Corinthians 15:45 we have the Messiah referred to as the "last Adam." As the first Adam is the head of a race of people, so is the last Adam placed at the head of a race or family. We don't have the space here to consider at length the two federal heads, but we know that those who are connected to the first Adam are related to sin and death, while those related to the last Adam are related to *life and eternal blessings* (I Corinthians 15:22). The first Adam lost his position of favour and likewise lost his position of the firstborn, while the Messiah "gained" the title and all its benefits by his *obedience* to God's commands.

Since the Messiah was raised to the status of firstborn, he naturally inherited the duties and benefits that go along with such a title. The duties and benefits are as follows:

- 1). He was *set apart* as belonging to God. Luke 1:32: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest..." John 8:28: "...I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me, I speak these things."
- 2). He received a *double portion* of an eternal inheritance. Hebrews 1:4: "...having become so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."
- 3). He acts as a priest. Hebrews 7:17: "...You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."
- 4). He will be appointed *ruler* over part of God's Kingdom. Luke 1:32-33: "...and the LORD God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob [Israel] forever..."
- 5). His name will be held in honour next to God's (Yehovah). Isaiah 9:6: "...and the government [of Jacob/Israel] will be upon his shoulders. And his name will be called the Wonder of the Counsellor, the Judge of the Mighty everlasting Father -- the Prince of Peace."

An important point that we should remember is that before the Messiah could enjoy the benefits we have just mentioned, he had to become the FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD. Not only did the Messiah's obedience grant him all the glorious benefits that God wished to bestow upon him, but more importantly, his *perfect obedience* made it possible for God to raise him from the dead and *grant him immortality*. In I Colossians 1:18 we read: "Also he [Christ] is head of the body, the Ecclesia -- he is the beginning, the *firstborn from the dead*, so that he might *hold first place in everything*."

Those who have *overcome* the most, who have had the *greatest experience*, who have *proved themselves* more effective than the others will have the highest position. Maybe you can begin to realise why some must go through more in this life than others. They have been invited or CALLED to a higher office in God's Kingdom. The Almighty God has not put a different price on immortality, but He does *require more* of some than of others to qualify for the high position that He has called them to.

Think how much more experience those in the FIRST RESURRECTION will have than those who will come after. They will have 1,000 years more experience in ruling in God's Kingdom than those to come later.

Those raised and changed to immortality at the Christ's coming will live and reign with God and the Christ for 1,000 years: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over)" (Revelation 20:4-5).

The glory of those who are "clothed" with immortality puts them permanently beyond the grasp of death: "Blessed and holy is anyone who has a part in the first resurrection; over him the second death has no power" (verse 6). These will be endowed with life in the likeness of the Messiah (1 John 3:2), attaining the destiny of those who remain faithful -- to "become a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45). This first resurrection, with those in it learning Yehovah God's way and being made immortal before the rest of the world, is clearly a "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35).

Think how great a responsibility God has offered to us -- the firstborn! By serving in a greater position of authority, we will be able to help and to serve *more people more effectively*.

Because of the *joy* that was set before him, Jesus Christ endured a hideous death on the tree. Maybe you too can now see better the *joy* that is set before you. God will not require of you more than you are able to bear. You *CAN* endure to the end! The way may seem difficult and hard at times -- and yet you need not stumble! "Therefore, brothers, try even harder to make your being called and chosen a certainty. For if you keep doing this, you will NEVER stumble" (II Peter 1:10, *ibid.*). If you do the things Peter mentions in II Peter 1, you will *never* stumble or fall. You *will* endure to the end. You will be in that BETTER resurrection -- the FIRST resurrection!

A Second Resurrection for Those Who Never Knew God Or Christ, the Messiah

What about those described in the book of Revelation as "the rest of the dead" who "did not come to life until the thousand years were over" (Revelation 20:5). Who are they? And what will become of them?

Comparatively few will be privileged to take part in the first resurrection to immortality. But untold billions will be surprised to find themselves rising up in a resurrection.

Many Christians have made the mistake of thinking there will be only one resurrection -- when both wicked and righteous will rise in judgment to be either rewarded or punished. But Revelation 20:5 plainly brands this an error. As a matter of fact, **NOWHERE** does the Bible say that God Yehovah) will resurrect **ALL** the dead in the *same* resurrection!

True, the apostle Paul affirmed "that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). And Jesus Christ (the Messiah) said: "...For the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life [eternal]; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [or, better translated, judgment]" (John 5:28).

Therefore, not thinking deeply, "Most Christians believe that on the last day of the world all the dead will come to life. They call the day Judgment Day, because God will judge everyone" (*World Book Encyclopaedia*, 1972 edition). But let us not fall into the **COMMON ERROR** of *assuming* that Paul and the Messiah meant the "just" and the "unjust" would be resurrected at the same time.

"The rest of the dead" constitute all those who were NOT "raised and changed to immortality at the Messiah's coming" and fall into two broad categories -- those who died never truly knowing the Jesus Christ, the Saviour, and those who have already wilfully rejected him as their personal saviour. These are two very different categories of people, facing two very different destinies.

The first group, who died without ever having known the Messiah, is described standing before the throne of God in a second resurrection: " And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

Are the "unjust" ones -- "both great and small" -- merely to be resurrected so God can fling them into the lake of fire to be burned up? What did Jesus mean

when he said that "they that have done evil [will be resurrected], unto the resurrection of judgment"? (John 5:29). Who are the "unjust" ones mentioned by Paul in Acts 24:15? Are those who died in sin really fully accountable for their actions in their "first life"? Have they *ever* had a chance for eternal salvation?

Astounding as it may seem to people who do not really know the Biblical teaching regarding the resurrections, countless billions are yet to be brought back to a mortal life to have their "first chance" to receive salvation.

Think for a moment. Could the untold billions who have lived and died possibly have received salvation? Have the vast majority *ever* had a chance to understand the Bible? Have they, then, really rejected salvation? NO! Many individuals have lived their entire lifetimes without ever seeing a Bible or even hearing the name of Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah. Are they forever doomed simply because they did not have access to the Word of God -- and *did not know* that the Messiah is the saviour of all mankind? What nonsense!

Could countless billions of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Taoists, animists and others who have not known about the Messiah and salvation be held guilty or accountable to the Lord God for not having received that VITAL knowledge?

Or, is it possible that they could receive salvation through some other person (Muhammad, perhaps), or by a different way? The apostle Peter EMPHATICALLY answers: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is NONE OTHER NAME under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Human beings can ONLY be saved if and when they learn of the Messiah as their saviour who died for them -- and then ACCEPT that supreme sacrifice in payment for their personal sins.

Jesus Christ said: "I am the DOOR: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). He made it abundantly clear that anyone who "enters not by the door [the Messiah] into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, THE SAME IS A THIEF AND A ROBBER" (verse 1). There is simply NO OTHER "DOOR" by which we can enter the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Scriptures plainly reveal that the time is coming when God will raise the "unjust" dead -- those who *through no fault of their own* were deceived and never understood the way of salvation -- and will at that time reveal His plan of salvation to them.

It is God's responsibility to grant people the knowledge of the TRUTH. The vast majority who have ever lived and died were, through no fault of their own,

deprived of this knowledge which could have made salvation possible in their first life-time. It therefore becomes imperative that God give them their FIRST real chance to hear, understand and FOLLOW GOD's way of salvation. But how? By raising them from the dead to *renewed physical life in a second resurrection!*

The prophet Ezekiel was given a vision by God in which he saw vast numbers of long-dead Israelites come back to life as flesh-and-blood human beings. In this vision, "breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army" (Ezekiel 37:1-10 -- NKJV).

"Then," God tells them, "you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it" (verses 13-14, *ibid.*).

A merciful God, not willing that any should perish, reaches out to all those to whom the "books" of the Bible had never been opened (in terms of understanding) and brings them back to life to offer them an intimate relationship with Him by putting His spirit in them -- a powerful demonstration of a merciful God so unwilling that any should perish that He reaches into the grave to offer life to the unsaved masses.

A Final Resurrection for Those Who Ultimately Reject God

But a merciful God, to be perfect, must also be just. When the billions are resurrected in the second resurrection, God will open up the Bible to their understanding. They will be given their first real chance to repent, accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and receive God's precious holy spirit. Their names will then be written in the Book of Life.

Now consider Revelation 20, verse 13: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [Greek: *hades*, grave] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were *judged* every man according to their *works*." Here is pictured another resurrection period. Who are these dead? What resurrection is this?

Notice that there is NO STATEMENT that the "book of life" is opened up to them. Why is the "book of life" not "opened" in connection with those who rise up in this final resurrection? Simply because they must have ALREADY HAD THEIR CHANCE for salvation -- and have rejected it!

The Almighty God and Father is not willing that any perish, yet it is not His will to *force* the truth on anyone. He will not force salvation down anyone's throat.

God offers salvation *freely* to all those who will receive it (Acts 2:21). And he has made every man a free moral agent -- with the power of volition, the power to *choose*. Those who do not voluntarily accept God's offer and follow the *way of life* necessary to receive life eternal will NOT receive it.

Those who come up in this *third* resurrection are the incorrigibly wicked. They are the LAST human beings to be resurrected from their graves -- from "the sea" (where they may have perished in their first life), from death (without burial in their first life), or from "hell" (a hole or grave in the ground).

These miserable beings will be *sentenced* by God -- and EXECUTED: "And death and hell were cast into the *lake of fire*. This is the *second death*. And whosoever was not found written in the *book of life* was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15). Lamentably, NONE who will be resurrected in this resurrection will have their names in the Lamb's (the Messiah's) book of life. THEREFORE THEY WILL ALL PERISH!

Jesus said: " Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." (Luke 13:24). Continuing with the context, the Messiah then goes on to picture himself as one who refuses to answer the knock of *incorrigible* sinners who have previously rejected salvation (as shown by other scriptures). In verse 28 he says: " There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."

When the time for the third resurrection arrives, everyone will have had his *chance*. Everyone's ultimate destiny will have been "fixed" eternally. It will be forever too late for anyone who -- after receiving his chance for salvation -- sinned *wilfully*, thereby rejecting eternal life. Those who rejected God and His way must then reap the consequences of that decision -- the SECOND DEATH, from which there will be NO resurrection.

From the time of righteous Abel until this very day, even righteous humans have had to suffer the *first death*. But it is the SECOND DEATH that is *FINAL* -- not the first (Revelation 20:14-15).

Those who have knowingly and wilfully defied the mercies and *commandments* of God in their lifetime -- even after coming to know God and His truth -- face a very different destiny in a final resurrection -- that of the second death. The unrepentant, incorrigibly wicked of past ages meet their Maker in a resurrection to receive justice through a second death in the lake of fire, from which there will be no resurrection.

The Biblical teaching on the three resurrections provides hope, destiny and justice for all. There will be three resurrections for three distinct groups of people -- each in their own order, each in their own time through the power of a perfectly merciful and perfectly just God not willing that any should perish forever.

Man's Destiny

Man's destiny is so great and awe-inspiring that few Christians have ever really grasped it. God -- through His Word -- repeatedly speaks of humans becoming sons in the very family of Yehovah God. Even God's angels are servants of these heirs of divine sonship: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14 -- *NKJV*).

Realising the "high calling" that God has given us, the apostle Paul wrote that Christians should "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. (Hebrews 2:1). He then asked: "...how will we escape if we *ignore* such a great deliverance...?" (verse 3, *ibid.*).

The book of Hebrews is filled with warnings to the believer not to get careless and lose out on eternal salvation. Paul warns Christians not to let a "root of bitterness" trouble and/or defile them (Hebrews 12:15).

But the sternest warning in the entire Bible is in the tenth chapter of Hebrews: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The apostle Paul then speaks of the severe punishment that will befall that wicked person "who has trampled underfoot the Son of God; who has treated as something common the blood of the covenant which made him holy; and who has *insulted the spirit*, giver of God's grace!" (verse 29, *ibid.*). Truly, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (verse 31).

It should be noted here that *wilful sin* is NOT to be equated with sin by force of habit or under heavy temptation. "Slipping," making mistakes, or occasionally falling down spiritually do NOT constitute wilful sin. A thorough exposition of this principle can be found in our articles *What, Exactly, Is -- "The Unpardonable Sin"?* and *What, Exactly, Do you Mean -- CONVERSION?*

But can a *true* believer draw back and be eternally destroyed? "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in

him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” (Hebrews 10:38-39)

We have seen that God is "not willing that any should perish." Furthermore, God has ordained that there will be three resurrections: the FIRST, to immortality at the arrival of God and the Messiah -- immediately before the millennium begins.

The SECOND is to take place shortly after the thousand-year rule of Yehovah God and the Messiah (Christ). Those who rise in the second resurrection comprise all the deceived multitudes who died without a saving knowledge of the truth.

The THIRD resurrection occurs at the very end of God's plan for mortal man on this earth. Those who rise up in the third and final resurrection are those who had their chance for salvation and deliberately turned it down. Yehovah God will be forced to extinguish the lives of those who have obstinately chosen the way of death! Remember -- God will NOT force eternal life down anyone's throat.

You should now be better able to understand what the apostle Paul meant by an "order" of resurrections mentioned in I Corinthians 15:23. He simply meant that there would be a succession of resurrections -- various ones rising at different times for different judgments.

The TRUE believer has a wonderful, eternal future ahead of him. "He who wins the victory will receive these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the untrustworthy, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who misuse drugs in connection with the occult, idol-worshippers, and all liars -- their destiny is the lake burning with fire and sulphur, the second death" (Revelation 21:7-8, *ibid.*).

Your eternal destiny -- your future -- is up to you! You can choose the way of God and eternal life through Jesus Christ, or you can choose Satan's way of lust, greed, strife and sin -- which will lead to total perdition -- to the "second death" in a lake of fire.

Let each one of us make sure that we make the *right choice*.

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